

# Coast Transit Authority

## COVID-19 Experience

June 5, 2020

### **What impacts have you seen from COVID-19 on passenger transportation operations and how have you responded to these impacts?**

CTA's first priority during this virus crisis was to focus on the safety and physical/financial welfare of transit employees. Our second priority was to provide safe transportation services for the public. We accomplished this by providing event specific PPE and training for all employees and implementing safety related operational procedures, such as eliminating fares and restricting seating areas on vehicles to create physical distance between drivers and passengers.

CTA ridership and revenue progressively decreased as the virus spread across the community. We reduced services as demand decreased. For a three-week period we were unable to provide safe service to the community and discontinued all fixed route services. A large portion of the workforce was placed on administrative leave with pay.

The result of these events was an increase in operating costs to provide protective and safety measures and a decrease in revenue from fares, contracts and advertising. Ridership decreased to a low of 30% of pre-Covid levels but has recovered recently to 50% with the lifting of restrictions.

### **What are your expectations for continued impacts on the passenger transportation system in the near future and its response to a reopening of the economy? What impacts do you anticipate for the passenger transportation system in the long term?**

The Gulf Coast is a tourism destination. The recent re-opening of casinos, restaurants and entertainment venues has gone better than expected. Although ridership is steadily increasing as reopening occurs, the public recognizes that public transportation is a high health risk. We are expecting that ridership will continue a slow, steady increase. Ridership will not pace with the success of the reopening of the economy. This will result in a diminished level of farebox revenue in the short term. The local governments loss of sales tax revenues will result in short term reductions in local operating subsidies.

Long term, as the virus runs its course, we expect to recover ridership to normal levels. However, the stigma that public transportation is not a safe mode will continue and will be detrimental to continued growth in ridership.

### **How have critical infrastructure employees been affected during the COVID-19 crisis while performing their duties, and what steps have been taken to protect them?**

CTA employees have been and remain very concerned about their risk for exposure. At times, 25 – 30% of the work force have been on leave due to personal or family high risk. We have supported those employees by providing paid leave and have provided hazardous duty pay for employees that remain on

the job. Our early purchase and distribution of PPE and implementation of protective procedures has resulted in none of the CTA employees being infected with the virus.

**What steps has your organization or have your members taken to protect the safety of the traveling public?**

Early in the outbreak CTA eliminated fare collections to expedite boarding and de-boarding, closed passenger facilities, encouraged physical distancing and provided hand sanitizer on buses. Implemented frequent cleaning and sanitizing of all high touch areas. When face mask recommendations were issued, we required all passengers to wear face coverings when on buses and in facilities.

**What additional guidance or support would be useful from the U.S. Department of Transportation, other federal agencies, and from Congress as you move forward during the COVID-19 public health crisis?**

U.S. DOT did not issue transit specific guidelines early on. CDC information has not been consistent throughout the event. The change in recommendation on wearing face masks was very problematic. The recommendation to wear face masks was issued at a time when there was an international shortage. CTA has struggled to maintain satisfactory levels of PPE to support our employees.

Public transportation agencies need to be elevated on the supply priority list.

**Please describe any ways that you or your members have been affected by the CARES Act and how it has affected your employees, operations, or other aspects of your business.**

The public transportation component of the CARES Act is very helpful to small transit systems like CTA. It gives us the short-term financial resources to compensate for loss of farebox revenue and local operating subsidies. It not only provides financial assistance to the agencies, but helps local government finances by eliminating monetary support to transit for a year. It provides the resources needed to improve PPE, materials, equipment, technology and procedures to prepare for future community health crisis and to provide a safer and more healthy transit system in the future.